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Philoliche cunhai Travassos Santos Dias, a synonym of Philoliche (Ommatiosteres) atricornis (Wiedemann) (Diptera, Tabanidae)

by

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SYNOPSIS

Philoliche cunhai T. Santos Dias (1955) is found to be a synonym of *P.* (*Ommatiosteres*) *atricornis* (Wiedemann 1821). Variation in the body coloration of *atricornis* is discussed, and an atypical male from the western Cape Province, with exceptionally short wings and reddish abdomen, is recorded.

Diptera: Tabanidae

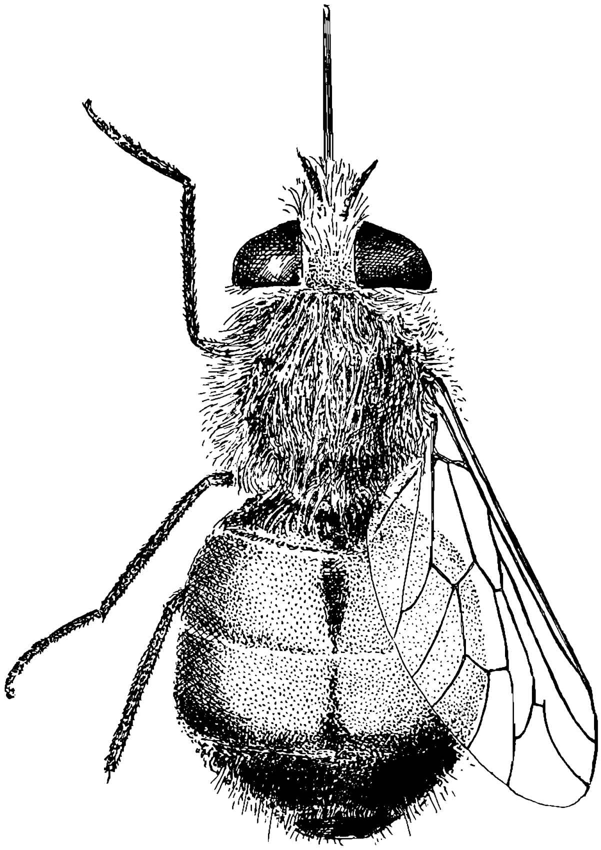
Philoliche (*Ommatiosteres*) *atricornis* (Wiedemann)

Pangonia atricornis Wiedemann, 1821, *Dipt. Exot.* **2**: 58.
Pangonia cingulata Wiedemann, 1828, *Auss. Zweif. Ins.* **1**: 103. NOT *P. cingulata* Thunberg, 1827, *Nova Acta Reg. Soc. sci. Uppsala* **9**: 70, which is synonymous with *angulata* Fabricius.
Philoliche (*Ommatiosteres*) *atricornis* Wiedemann; Oldroyd, 1957, *Horseflies Ethiop. Reg.* **111**: 384
Philoliche cunhai Travassos Santos Dias, 1955, *Mem. Estud. Mus. Zool. Coimbra* **236**: 1–3. **NEW SYNONYMY.**

Due to the kindness of Dr L. Tsacas of the Paris Museum, I have been privileged to study the holotype of *Philoliche cunhai* T. Santos Dias. Oldroyd (1957) gives a detailed description of the holotype of *P.* (*O.*) *atricornis* (Wiedemann) which is in the Winthem collection, deposited in the Natural History Museum of Vienna. The differences between *cunhai* and the type revealed by this description appear to be the length and colouring of the hairs of the head and mesonotum. For *atricornis* the hairs of the head are described as shaggy, but those of the frons as few and black, whereas those of *cunhai* are fewer, neater, shorter and white. Also, the mesonotal hairs of the holotype are given as mixed black and yellowish, whereas those of *cunhai* are white, becoming yellowish posteriorly.

P. (*O.*) *atricornis* is a very widely distributed species of variable size; 12 mm length is the range given by Oldroyd. On more than one occasion I have been mislead by live flies to suspect the discovery of a new species, pollen coating and size differences resulting in a variable appearance. However, most specimens, when examined microscopically, agree remarkably well with Oldroyd's description. In the Natal Museum, there is a long series from the Pateni Tea Estates near Richmond, Natal, which, though small, are fairly uniform in colour with intensely black tergites. They have yellowish pollen coating the thorax, giving them an all-over black and yellow appearance. The hairs of the head are moderately long, but not shaggy, and mostly white with some black ones. The mesonotal hairs are sometimes entirely whitish, or mixed black and white, or pale yellow. Three specimens from Bushmans River Bridge, near Grahamstown, eastern Cape Province, are larger, rather brown and have a different colour, due to a dusting of bright reddish-orange pollen. There is also a typical specimen from Willowmore and another from the dry Karoo area of Laingsburg. The species is thus known from a wet summer rainfall area, a wet winter rainfall area, a year-round rainfall area and a dry Karoo winter rainfall area. Throughout the colour pattern is the same, although the hairs show a certain amount of variation in both colour and length (within which range fall both the holotypes of *atricornis* and *cunhai*). There is an altogether dark brown and white specimen from Port St Johns which may have faded from black and yellow/white.

There is, however, a very puzzling series from Stellenbosch which varies greatly in size and colour of hairs of head and thorax (yellowish to white), amongst which is a female with distinctly reddish sides to the abdomen. Dr A. J. Hesse of the South African Museum sent me a very much redder male from Stellenbosch caught in 1887, and four males from Bowesdorp (S.A. Mus. staff, 1941) only one of which is typically *atricornis* in colour, the others showing a varying amount of reddish colour on the anterior tergites. Both the reddest Bowesdorp and Stellenbosch males are a little greasy and rubbed, the white bands being yellowed, less conspicuous and even discontinuous along the second hind margin. The browning of the melanic pigment in tabanids is well known, especially laterally on the abdomen, and has been suggested by Mr Oldroyd (*in litt.*) as a possible cause for the colour variation in this instance.



The bright mahogany brown of the Stellenbosch male is very striking, although the greasiness may be accentuating contrast.

Dissections of the male genitalia show a degree of variation among the males from Bowesdorp. The Stellenbosch male and a typical *atricornis* male are again slightly different. Dissections have not given any positive evidence for a separation into different species; there is as much variation between males of one region as between males of widely separate regions.

This study of *atricornis* material was prompted by the presence in the Natal Museum collection of a curious, predominantly yellow-brown male (see figure), caught by R. E. Turner in 1920, in Ceres, Cape Province, at 457 m. The general appearance of this fly is very peculiar: the wings are proportionately shorter than any tabanid I have yet seen, and look ineffectual folded next to the rotund, expanded abdomen. Because of the lack of white transverse bands, this specimen does not fit into the key to the species of *Ommatiosteres* (Oldroyd 1957: 365), but being rubbed and greasy, these bands may once have been present.

I make mention of this specimen here because, although it is too damaged for me to decide its specific status let alone to describe, it may represent a distinctive taxon now extinct due to agricultural development and habitat deterioration around Ceres. I give below the ways in which it differs from *atricornis*, hoping more material will be found, if not at Ceres, perhaps nearby or hidden in some collection.

The wings of *atricornis* are notably rather small, but those of the Ceres male are even smaller, shorter and narrower. The abdomen is very rotund, the second and third segments yellow-brown with only a small black spot medially on the tergites. There is no trace of white hind margins, but these could have been lost due to rubbing, although there are lateral tufts of white hairs on all hind lateral angles of the tergites except the third (as in *atricornis*). The hairs on the thorax are very pale yellow, silky with a few stiffer black ones, all longer than usual, with no sign of tomentum visible on lateral or sublateral stripes. The hairs on the head are white, and like those of thorax, longer and shaggier than I have seen on any *atricornis*.

In conclusion, the holotype of *cunhai* fits well within the range of the widespread, mostly constant, species *atricornis*. However, in the western Cape Province, there are specimens with red colouring, though otherwise they appear to conform with normal *atricornis*. The strange, pale, very shaggy, rotund specimen, caught in the mountains of Ceres, could be simply an extension of this variation.

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